

## THE CURIOUS ORIGIN OF *SIXPENCE WASTED* – AKA, *THE MARROW SONG*

On September 19th 1893 Arthur Tanner (“*Tanner by Name, Tanner by Nature, Ladies*”) made history when he stepped onto the stage of the Lyric Hall Ealing and sang, “That Was Sixpence Wasted!”

The song (also known as “The Marrow Song”, though not to be confused with the 1952 Edrich Siebert number of the same name) is, as far as we know, unique in that it was commissioned, written, and performed by undercover police officers. How could this happen?

In June 1892 The Times had launched a campaign by thundering: “A Spectre is haunting Europe. The Spectre of Vegetarianism!”

At a stroke Vegetables and their champions – such as Edward Carpenter and G B Shaw – were declared enemies of the people.

Vegetarians, claimed The Times, were the Hidden Army of Revolution whose meat-free practices were designed to fatally sap the will of the British People. Once enfeebled in body and mind by a meat-free diet, the proud Nation would be unable to resist the Socialist Insurgency that would turn it into an egalitarian despotism. “Britons!! Act now! We implore you, before Vegetables turn you into Slaves!”

If not actually prepared in collusion with Whitehall, the message was certainly heard there. Scotland Yard put prominent Vegetarians were put under surveillance. Agent Provocateurs smashed the windows of greengrocers and overturned market stalls. But recently published have shown that, perhaps for the first time, steps were also taken to change public attitudes to counter the “Scourge of Meatlessness in the Public Mind” by promoting anti-vegetable pro-meat messages.

In an early recognition of the burgeoning power of entertainment media, Special Branch commissioned the music hall song “Sixpence Wasted” from a student at the Royal College of Music. His or her name has yet to be revealed, and perhaps never will be, but what is certain is that the plan to ridicule Vegetarians through song was a disaster. Arthur Tanner stamped his feet so much that his baggy trousers fell down half way through the performance and he was booed off the Lyric stage when the Audience realised that this was a genuine accident. As a result Special Branch judged the song to be jinxed. The propaganda programme was shelved and ‘Tanner’ briefly resumed his real identity as Prince Wladislav Zhoulgin, exiled Ruritanian nobleman and Police spy, and disappears from history.

Here is the Song itself, recently discovered in a draw at the RCM. Is it jinxed? Who can say? Readers might judge by singing it for themselves.

But perhaps not in a public place wearing trousers...

### OH WHAT CAN I DO WITH THIS...?

I went down to the Vicarage garden  
Where they was all holdin' a Fete.  
I moseyed around to the Lucky Tub stall  
And Blimey! Weren't them prizes great?

An Old Lady won an Onion ring.  
A Toddler bagged a Teddy.  
When a Young Man walked off with a wind-up watch...  
I strode up with my sixpence ready.

The Vicar said, “Excuse me, sir,  
Don't you see that there is a queue?”  
But I don't care what a Vicar says  
And I pushed my way right on through.

I dropped my tanner in the tin  
And dug in the tub for me ticket.  
I found one and hung on as tight as I could,  
Afraid that somebody'd nick it.

The Vicar looked me number up,  
All laughin' with his eyes,  
He said, "Well aren't you the luckiest chap?"  
As he pointed out me Prize...

No it wasn't a wind-up watch  
And not even an onion ring.  
I would have settled for a teddy bear  
But instead I got given this..... THING. *So tell me.....*

What can you do with a Marrow?  
You can't eat it, whatever they say.  
The Dog turns his nose up, the Tomcat just throws up.  
And you can't even chuck it away!

The Dustmen, they bloomin' won't take it  
They left a note saying, "Don't dare!"  
The Salvation Army said "You're effing barmy!"  
Who ever knew that *They* could swear?

I begged a Fine Lady in Harrods  
"Please have some of this, I implore..."  
But when I showed her me Marrow  
She screamed and ran out the front door.

I've chucked it over the neighbour's wall  
I've chucked it into the sea.  
I've chucked it orf ever-y London bridge...  
But... It always comes right back to me.

If I ever ascend into Heaven, I worry  
St Peter will say: "Bid welcome, my dear.  
Your life's struggles are done.  
And your best mate is waiting right here."

I'll mutter "Oh where, I don't see him, Sir,"  
Pretending I'm ever so keen!  
And St Peter'll point, "E's the one over there  
Who's so long and so fat and so green."

So if you're ever thinking to try it,  
Remember what happened to me.  
Don't never have dealings with Marr---a---rows.  
Save your sixpence and your sanity!